



Varicella Vaccine

(Chicken Pox)

What You Need to Know

Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS) are provided by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM). Written for soldiers and their families, they provide basic information on deployment medications that are intended as guidance only; consult your health care provider for more information.

What is varicella?

Varicella, also known as chickenpox, is a highly contagious disease caused by the varicella-zoster virus (VZV). It is characterized by an itchy rash, which forms blisters that dry and become scabs in 4 to 5 days. The rash may be the first sign of illness, sometimes coupled with fever and general tiredness, which is usually more severe in adults. It can lead to skin infection, scars, pneumonia, brain damage, or death. Years later, a person who has had chickenpox can get a painful rash called shingles.

How do you get varicella?

The virus spreads from person to person by direct contact through respiratory droplets or through the air.

Who should get the vaccine and how is it given?



- This vaccination is given to persons over 1 year of age to protect against chicken pox.
- Your health care provider will inject the vaccine into your upper arm. Adults, 12 years and older, receive two doses 4 to 8 weeks apart.

What does the military require?

The vaccine may be required for susceptible military members, especially recruits and other trainees, living in military environments conducive to person-to-person spread of respiratory diseases (such as barracks). It may also be required for susceptible health care personnel who have direct patient contact.

Are there any side effects?

- The most common side effects are burning, stinging, pain or redness at the injection site, mild fever, and skin rash.
- Other side effects include cough, irritability, headache, loss of appetite, and fatigue. If any of these effects continue beyond a few days or become bothersome, inform your health care provider.
- Call your health care provider if you have a high fever, breathing trouble, chills, hives, or a stiff neck.

Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?

- This vaccine contains a live virus. Tell your health care provider if you have any illness, infections, blood disorders, or immune system disorders; are receiving immunosuppressive therapy; or if you have any allergies, especially to gelatin or to neomycin antibiotic.
- Once vaccinated, you may transmit the vaccine virus to close contacts. Therefore, you should avoid close contact with susceptible high-risk individuals (for example, newborns, pregnant women, and immunocompromised persons).
- Tell your health care provider if you're taking any over-the-counter or prescription medication including aspirin and aspirin-containing medications, steroids, or prednisone.
- If you are receiving immunosuppressants, the effectiveness of the vaccine may be decreased and the risk of varicella increased.
- Salicylates (such as aspirin) may increase the risk of Reye's syndrome, and should be avoided for 6 weeks after vaccination.

What if I'm pregnant or breast-feeding?

- This medication is not to be given during pregnancy. It is also recommended that women avoid pregnancy for three months after receiving this vaccine. Discuss the risks and benefits with your health care provider.
- Use during breast-feeding should be avoided.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose for any reason, the missed dose should be administered as soon as possible and then the dosing schedule continued. The vaccination series should NOT be re-started.

You *can* avoid getting varicella!

- Get each vaccination as scheduled.

Be sure the vaccination is recorded in your medical record.

Where can I get more information?

- Health care provider at your military treatment facility.
- Military Immunizations web page: <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/immunization/vaccines.html>
- CDC Specific Disease web site: www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm
- CDC Vaccine Information web site: www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm

DMIS Provided by:

*Disease and Injury Control Program
U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine
5158 Blackhawk Road
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5403
410-436-2464 or DSN 584-2464
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil/dcpm/CDI/DMIS.htm>*

